



**Dear Friends,**

Let us carry the Easter flame we have received into the world to set it alight with the love of Christ!

Through some unanticipated artifice, the stories that have found their way into this issue of eNews lend themselves to the theme of discipleship. Chapter 2 verses 42 and 47 of the Acts of the Apostles relate the four concerns that governed the early Christian communities;

*“...devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers...all who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”*

Catholic tradition admits to a wide spectrum in the way Christians interpret community life and the quality of discipleship. There are the ‘teachings’ (*didache*) Catholics who strive for deeper understandings of the doctrine of the church as expressions of greater discipleship. While the ‘fellowship’ (*koinonia*) Catholics see stronger communal bonds and shared life as a way to better faith. On another plane, the ‘prayer’ (*leitourgia*) Catholics emphasize forging strong relationship with God by conscientious celebration of the liturgy and a high quality of worship. Rounding off the pack are the ‘mission’ (*diakonia*) Catholics who shape their practice of religion around evangelization through action and serving the various needs of the world around them.

Such richness and diversity within our tradition! Where among or between these four ‘corners’ of Catholicism would you place yourself as a Christian? Which concern is most/least emphasized, looking at the activities and relationships in your group?

Happy pondering!

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# FIRST AID FOR MENTAL ILLNESS



34 participants came to be trained as first aiders for mental illness at St Mary of the Angels by Mr Joachim Lee, a qualified MHFA instructor on 23 February, 1 & 8 March. The Mental Health First Aid course was first developed in Australia in 2000. The programme was introduced here in Singapore in 2006. Last year, a

memorandum of understanding was signed by MHFA Australia and Changi General Hospital, for CGH to be the representative body for MHFA (Singapore), to see to the reproduction of the manuals for local training as well as the training of instructors.

Why conduct this course in church? It is precisely in the church community that we meet many of our fellow brothers and sisters. It is therefore helpful if some among us are trained to recognize mental health problems to provide the initial help and guide someone facing mental illness towards professional help. Also, this is a good tool for those in small Christian communities to reach out to those who are suffering mental illness in silence in and around the neighbourhoods.

Having completed the 12-hour programme, the participants received a certificate issued by MHFA (Singapore). Here is what some participants have to say:



**“I find the course very interesting, informative, useful, educational, and inspiring....I recommend that ALL PRIESTS and pastoral workers attend this course since they would encounter people with mental health problems in the course of their pastoral ministry. Thanks to SPI for offering**

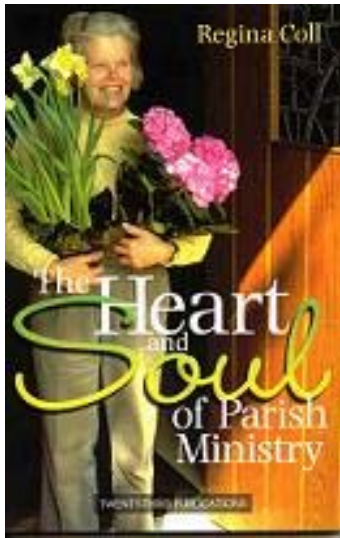
**such seemingly "secular" courses but by no means irrelevant to life.”**

*“The MHFA Course organised by the SPI is very useful.”*

*“This is a very enriching and an eye-opener course. Gives me a better understanding of Mental Health.”*

*“Should conduct this course in more churches for more awareness of Mental Health issues.”*

The next Mental Health First Aid course will be held in the **Church of Risen Christ on 24 & 25 May**. Those interested, please call 6858 3011 or email [spi@catholic.org.sg](mailto:spi@catholic.org.sg) to register.



**Book Review:**  
**The Heart and Soul  
of Parish Ministry**

– *Regina Coll*

Have you wondered why people join parish ministries? Whatever may be the reason; there is a deeper underlying motivation – a search for God. The serving in various ministries is really an attempt to make meaning of our faith and to establish a relationship with God. So the parish really has only one job: fostering the relationship between God and people. All activities in the parish, be it liturgy, catechism or social outreach should contribute to that relationship.

Regina Coll in this book invites all to reflect more deeply on the spirituality needed in parish ministry. She challenges us to look beyond our activities to the faith that motivates them and to the ultimate aim, which is to build and enhance relationship between God and people. In the book, Regina provides easy to understand explanation of doctrines and theology to establish the faith foundation necessary for parish ministry. She offers reflections and suggestions including our imaging of God and Jesus, how we live the reality of grace, and our understanding of church as sacrament.

Besides learning the skills needed for particular ministry, it is important for all in parish ministry to have a deeper insight into their reason of being. Thus, this book is recommended for those who wish to embark on parish ministry and those who are already involved to get a firm understanding of why we are in ministry and the primary purpose of all parish ministries.

*Regina Coll, CSJ, Ed.D., is a long-time educator in the field of parish ministry, and a former member of the department of theology at Notre Dame University, Indiana. This book is available in SPI library.*

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### **Pastoral Care of the Terminally Ill**

*A workshop by Singapore Pastoral Institute facilitated by Sr Una Boland, LCM.*

Come to the pastoral care workshop and learn through role play, active listening and communication practice, to communicate and support a terminally ill patient.

Date: 19 April 2008

Time: 2.00pm – 5.00pm

Venue: 2 Highland Road.

Contribution: Love Offering.

Call 6858 3011 or email [spi@catholic.org.sg](mailto:spi@catholic.org.sg) to register.



# **MAKING CATHOLICS** **THE RCIA WAY /** **THE SOUL OF THE** **RCIA**

*By Joyce Gan*

## **The Process**

Every year in our Archdiocese, close to a thousand converts are born and baptized through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process in our churches. The journey of an RCIA process takes one to two years, culminating at Baptism, usually held at Easter Vigil Masses.

Today's RCIA process was revived by the Second Vatican Council when it recognized this ancient practice of Christian initiation as a proper form for the modern world. Rather than receiving private instruction from priests as it had once evolved into, the Second Vatican Council felt the need to reintroduce the community aspect of the initiation process, including liturgical elements contained within the Rite.

In Singapore, the RCIA involves a ministry of sponsors. A sponsor is someone who accompanies catechumens (those seeking to learn more about the faith) through the journey – through the major Rites held over the year, conversion experiences and through the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist) into the Catholic Church. They are also the catechumens' first encounter with the Christian community.

Some parishes run RCIA on a lecture-based series of classes where priests conduct catechism at each session. Other parishes adopt the Singapore Pastoral Institute's recommendation of "Our Journey Together" (OJT), a text that facilitates a Christian community experience. The RCIA groups usually meet twice a week – once on a weekday night and once at "Breaking of the Word" sessions held at Sunday Masses. This is when the group is dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word to "break open" God's word since the catechumens need to learn to draw nourishment from the word

of God before they can partake of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Whatever the method, the goal of the RCIA is the same – to help catechumens find and follow God, whom they are searching for, according to the Catholic tradition.

## **A Head to Heart Process**

The coordinator of the RCIA process at Church of the Holy Spirit, Tony See, unravels a misconception that many catechumens, and even sponsors, have about the RCIA.

"Many come expecting an academic-like course on the Christian faith that will culminate with baptism but little do they realize they have been called into a life-changing process that is charted to end in the eternal glory of God," he says.

"Facts, doctrines and knowledge are undoubtedly important but are worthless if they do not inspire and lead us to live Christian lives," Tony continues. "This is why our sessions are geared toward the 'opening up' of the lives of both catechumens and sponsors by sharing our own life experiences and highlighting the presence of God in our daily life situations ... sometimes, the simplest and most mundane experiences too."

Tony relates one of his oft-used maxims, "The most difficult part of any faith journey is the 'travel' from the head to the heart." The path of this 'travel' is constantly communicated to the catechumens through sharing faith experiences that help them discover God in their personal life because "it is only when God's wisdom reaches their hearts that they begin a relationship with God. This is also when the journey becomes spiritually meaningful for the catechumen; the journey finding its soul," adds Tony.

"Every journey, we go into great pain to differentiate this – that the RCIA is neither a class nor a course but a transforming process!" he emphasizes.

This is also why sponsors at Holy Spirit parish RCIA are constantly reminded not to refer to the RCIA process as a "class". Instead, they affectionately call it a "journey".

And the toughest part of the journey is sometimes refraining from

allowing it to become an “RCIA Inc.” he says. It is not about organizing a journey well, having the best Music Ministry or being highly-efficient that counts. After all, there are always easier and more efficient ways to reach a goal. And then there is the ‘longer’ route – doing things less efficiently but having more people, “sweat, cry and bleed” to reach the same goal, Tony says. “We always choose to take the ‘longer’ route,” he affirms.

Because in these ‘longer’ routes, we learn how to be members of a Christian community: “instruments to pass on the command Jesus gave us to ‘Love God, and love one another as I have loved you’”, he reiterates.

### **The RCIA – Catalyst for Renewal**

“A good initiation process will always keep the winds of renewal current in the parish,” Tony quotes from Thomas Morris’ *“The RCIA: Transforming the Church”* to emphasize how converts can be catalysts for faith renewal.

Although the RCIA text clearly states that the parish community is an important ministry within the RCIA journeys, Tony reveals that the experience itself can be quite different – it is often the conversions among catechumens and powerful renewal experiences sponsors gain that “inspire winds of change in the parish”.

Yes, baptized Catholics as sponsors can receive just as much, if not more, from journeying with a catechumen as Tony explains, “Sponsors are actually more ready to embrace transformation as we come to the ministry consciously looking for an avenue to serve. In return, we experience a special joy in our hearts knowing that here we have found a meaningful, almost tailor-made ministry for us to live up to our baptismal mission as disciples spreading the Good News.”

“Catechumens are gifts of God to the whole community,” Tony adds. “They belong to the whole parish community and not to RCIA alone.”

The RCIA journey also has to play its part in reaching out to the community, he says. One of the things the parish RCIA did for Christmas last year was to encourage the catechumens and sponsors

to get together to prepare thoughtful gifts for other ministries in the Church.

This impacted the ministries where most responded with heartfelt thanks, Tony is pleased to note. In this way, the catechumens learn about the parish community and what each ministry does. In turn, the community is also more aware of these “new blood”, soon to be a part of them.

He continues, “We have remnants of pre-Vatican II mentality in the way we practise our faith sometimes, but these newly baptized can be the refreshing antidotes that we need to go forth as Catholics to meet the challenges of the fast-moving world,” he reflects.

This is why Tony feels a necessity to raise the awareness of parish communities towards the newly baptized who leave on a high spiritual note but can soon feel displaced without the constant and reliable support of their familiar sponsors.

“It can be like falling off a spiritual cliff,” he describes.

“The newly baptized are often termed the future of the church. Seriously, they are, for what they have grown into. They have a sharper sense of community and a deeper understanding of the necessity to find conversion in the heart.” And for their presence to transform the church, they have to be cared for and supported even after their baptism.

“Being a sponsor or being part of any work of the Church is working on God’s vineyard. The RCIA is just another plot of land on the vineyard with its specific role. The impact of a good harvest on our plot can have an uplifting impact on the whole vineyard. Similarly, within a parish community, the RCIA can be the catalyst for renewal,” he says.

Tony’s care of the catechumens pushes him forward on his own faith journey to continue to look out for them. He shares his vision of forming a support group for them after they leave the RCIA – a group with a similar spirit of community to gradually ease them into the main community.

“God willing, their ‘new fire’ will set alight the rest of the parish! But this does not come under the scope of the

RCIA,” he says firmly. “It belongs to the whole parish community.”

Aside from being in the RCIA for six journeys (four as Coordinator), and about to embark on the seventh, Tony See is also an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, an Ex-Co member on the Parish Pastoral Council and he also helps to run the canteen at the Holy Spirit parish. His work requires him to wake up at 4.30am on most mornings till the work day ends for him at 5pm. The end of the work day means the start of working on RCIA – daily.

When asked if he is tired, Tony replies joyfully, “I have found true meaning in my life in the RCIA. It is a privilege to witness at close hand God’s transforming love giving life to so many... yes, catechumens and sponsors are for me, life-giving. I know, because they have given life to me!”

## THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES LEND SUPPORT...

Bee Hwa was married to Bob, a Catholic for 20 years. They had a daughter, Tricia. Bob has stopped going to church since his youth days. Both Bee Hwa and Tricia were not baptized.

Three years ago, Bob was sent to Vietnam for work. Bee Hwa and Tricia remained in Singapore. During this time, Rosalind, Bee Hwa’s neighbour, who is a Catholic, invited Bee Hwa to their Christmas party. Bee Hwa went and was introduced to the other Catholic neighbours. As she was curious about her husband’s religion, she started joining this group of neighbours whenever they come together for gospel sharing. Soon, Bee Hwa decided to join the Catholic faith and enrolled herself in the RCIA journey. All through her journey, she was supported by her Catholic neighbours. She found out later that they are the Small Christian Community (SCC) gathering in her neighbourhood.

Just as Bee Hwa was preparing for her baptism, she found out that Bob was living with another woman in Vietnam and had asked for a divorce. Feeling devastated, Bee Hwa decided not to go ahead with her baptism. The SCC members learnt of this and gathered to give her comfort. They took turns to visit her and tried to involve her in some social activities. Bee Hwa was grateful to them as she was lost and lonely. Her parents had blamed her decision to join the Catholic faith as reason for her marriage break-up. Bee Hwa was under tremendous stress.

One day, Bob came back to Singapore to get Bee Hwa to sign the divorce papers. An argument broke out between the two and Bob hit Bee Hwa. She was badly injured. The SCC members came and visited her. They continued to give her comfort and support through her ordeal. Bee Hwa felt the love and warmth of God through this group of people. Finally, she decided to go ahead with her baptism. On her baptism day, her own family was not present, but all her Catholic neighbours turned up and welcomed her into God’s family. Feeling touched, Bee Hwa commented that even though none of her family members turned up, she was not alone as she had her SCC, her extended family.

Life ahead for Bee Hwa is not easy, faced with divorce; she has to start looking for a job. Bob is contesting to have a share of the house, so she may have to sell her flat eventually. However, Bee Hwa knows that no matter what happens, her SCC members will always be there for her, supporting and caring whenever she needs it.

*Adapted from true stories in a SCC.*